



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northwest Region
7800 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg. 1
Seattle, WA 98115

October 15, 2008

Richard Brocksmitth
Leads Entity Coordinator
Hood Canal Coordinating Council
17791 Fjord Drive NE, Box HH
Poulsbo, Washington 98370-8481

Re: NMFS Puget Sound Domain Team Review of Summer Chum Salmon Habitat
Projects Proposed for Funding in 2009

Dear Richard:

In a September 26, 2008 letter to NMFS, the Hood Canal Coordinating Council (HCCC) requested an independent review by the Northwest Region's Puget Sound Domain Team of nine habitat projects proposed for funding through the 2009 Salmon Recovery Funding Board process. Your specific interest is in the Domain Team's qualitative assessment of how well the proposed projects respond to population viability and habitat limiting factor remediation needs described in the Summer Chum Salmon Recovery Plan. The Summer Chum Salmon Recovery Plan, with a NMFS plan Supplement, was approved by NMFS in 2007 as the ESA framework for recovering and delisting the threatened Hood Canal Summer Chum Salmon ESU. The Puget Sound Domain Team guided development and Federal approval of the recovery plan, and is now responsible for providing assistance to the action entities in implementing habitat, harvest, and hatchery-related actions included in the plan.

In response to your request, we present in this letter the Domain Team's consensus assessment of the nine habitat projects for implementation in 2009 (Table 1). As you are aware, individual Domain Team members previously reviewed and ranked by priority the proposed project this summer at the HCCC's request. Our input was requested as part of a comprehensive technical review process involving a diverse cast of reviewers from State, tribal, and local jurisdictions. Our understanding is that the project rankings presented in the Appendix M attachment to your September 26, 2008 letter reflect the outcome of the HCCC technical review process in which we were involved, as adjusted by the results of a later policy review process that included other entities.

The attached Domain Team assessments of the habitat projects consider how well each project addresses the recovery needs and habitat limiting factors for the "Tier 1 and Tier 2" summer chum salmon populations and watersheds defined in the ESA approved Summer Chum Salmon Recovery Plan. We strongly believe that given the status of



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extant summer chum populations, the progress made thus far in reintroducing several recently extinct populations, and the scarcity of sufficient funds available for salmon recovery in the region, projects directed at addressing the needs of Tier 1 and Tier 2 population watersheds must be prioritized for SRFB funding. We note that two of the proposed projects will primarily benefit species other than summer chum salmon. The Domain Team's ranking of these projects for funding reflects their potential importance for addressing habitat limiting factors to the recovery of listed Puget Sound Chinook salmon and Puget Sound steelhead. Although our focus is on benefits to summer chum salmon for this exercise, we must also recognize the importance of funding projects benefiting other listed species in the Summer Chum Salmon Recovery Plan action area, which overlaps with habitat critical to the recovery of listed Chinook salmon and steelhead.

In summary, we found that the nine proposed projects, and the rankings provided by the HCCC in Appendix M, are consistent with recovery plan action implementation priorities described in the NMFS approved ESA recovery plan for the listed summer chum salmon ESU. In particular, the top three projects address important habitat limiting factors to the survival and productivity of key summer chum salmon aggregations comprising the Hood Canal and eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca sub-populations. The other two projects rounding out the top five will primarily benefit listed Chinook salmon and steelhead in the Skokomish River watershed, but the projects should also help improve conditions for the eventual re-colonization of the river by summer chum salmon. The Skokomish River is believed to have been a primary production area for summer chum salmon in the Hood Canal region prior to extirpation of the native population as a result of habitat loss and degradation.

Thank you for requesting the Domain Team's input regarding implementation of actions designed to benefit recovery of the Hood Canal summer chum salmon ESU. Please call Tim Tynan (360-753-9579) if you have any questions regarding this Domain Teams response to the HCCC's request for NMFS assistance.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Babcock
Recovery Coordinator

Cc Tim Tynan, NMFS
Susan Bishop, NMFS SFD
Thom Hooper, NMFS HCD
Matt Longenbaugh, NMFS HCD

Table 1. 2009 HCCC habitat project compliance with recovery action and limiting factor remediation priorities identified in the Summer Chum Salmon Recovery Plan. NMFS Northwest Region Puget Sound Domain Team. October 8, 2008.

Project Rank	Project Name	Project Sponsor	Target Summer Chum Aggregation	Watershed/Habitat Tier in SCP	Is Action a Priority in Recovery Plan?	Project Addresses Key Habitat Limiting Factor?
1	Big Quilcene River ELJ Restoration Phase 2	Skokomish	Quilcene	1	Yes	Yes
2	Little Quilcene River Delta Cone Removal	HCSEG	Quilcene	1	Yes	Yes
3	Snow Salmon Railroad Grade Removal Design	NOSC	Salmon/Snow	1	Yes	Yes
4	Skokomish River General Investigation	Skokomish	*	2	Yes *	Yes *
5	Gibbons Creek Fish Passage Restoration	MCD	*	2	Yes *	Yes *
6	Knotweed Control and Riparian Enhancement	HCSEG	HC sub-pop	1,2	Yes	Yes
7	West Kitsap Hood Canal Nearshore Assessment	Kitsap County	HC sub-pop	1,2	Yes	Yes
8	Tahuya River Habitat Restoration	HCSEG	Tahuya	2	Yes	Yes
	Washington Harbor Restoration Design **	Jamestown	ESJF sub-pop	1,2	Yes	Yes

Notes:

* These projects in the Skokomish River watershed will primarily benefit listed Chinook salmon and steelhead, with potential incidental benefits to summer Skokomish summer chum salmon population recolonization.

** The Puget Sound Domain Team did not review and rank this project relative to the other eight projects in its summer, 2008 technical evaluation process.